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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

PAINTING ON WOOD.

CONCLUDING PAPER.

BY

MADGE HEPWORTH DIXON.



SCREENS form so integral a part of modern rooms that I cannot finish my articles on Painting on Wood without touching on this cosiest of recent institutions. Time was, it is true, when drawing-room and boudoir alike were screenless, when the unbroken lines of four walls stared each other out of

countenance, when little or nothing softened the angularity of ceiling, cornice, chimney-piece and door, when snug corners did not exist, or taste or comfort for that matter either. But we have changed all this, and whatever sins of omission may be brought against us children of the latter half of the nineteenth century, it surely cannot be that of disregarding the refinements of life. Assuredly we have learnt to make ourselves comfortable in a hundred ways not dreamt of by our fathers and mothers in the early Victorian era. To these a draught at door or window—we know where to place the judicious screen—just high enough to exclude the draught, not high enough to exclude the view, have we a hard line, a rigid folding door to conceal, again the screen is called into requisition with the happy result we all know.

The modern screen, indeed, is a thing to conjure with. Small wonder that we find it not only in every house but in every room, in every hall and passage one might almost say, for some of the most beautiful screens I have lately seen have been used in the large open halls so often found now in town, as well as country houses. Employed for so many different purposes screens are naturally to be found in as many different shapes, materials and designs as there are styles in furniture. At Sir Bruce Seton's house in Chelsea a screen is much admired which is formed of the separate panels of an early German altar piece. Both back and front of the screen are lined with these beautiful panels, which represent various scenes out of the New Testament, and apart altogether from the subject, which is perhaps hardly suited to the employment it is put to, the gorgeous coloring and spirited movement form, from an artistic standpoint, an ideal for decorative design. Another screen, made in a totally different style, was used in a deep octagon window, and was made in the daintiest of white wood, with small glass panels above, while sprays of guelder roses and single dahlias were sketched in their natural colors on the wooden panels below. Yet another, the most graceful I have seen, and which is nothing more than a revival of the rococo period, had panels of graduated height. This novel shape, which effectually does away with the straight lines presented by the ordinary screen, was carried out in quaintly carved wood work, the panels themselves varying in height from some four up to six feet. A screen thus constructed can either be made of wood, painted white, and ornamented with Boucher designs, or have merely the framework of wood, the panels being formed of different pieces of Louis XV. brocade. Nothing can be dainter than the effect of the last named screen for a drawing-room or boudoir, while for a dining-room or hall it would be difficult to find anything as original as the screen I have mentioned as belonging to Sir Bruce Seton.

The idea of this medieval altar piece is so original that it will doubtless find admirers on the other side of the Atlantic, and more than one American determined to imitate it. Early

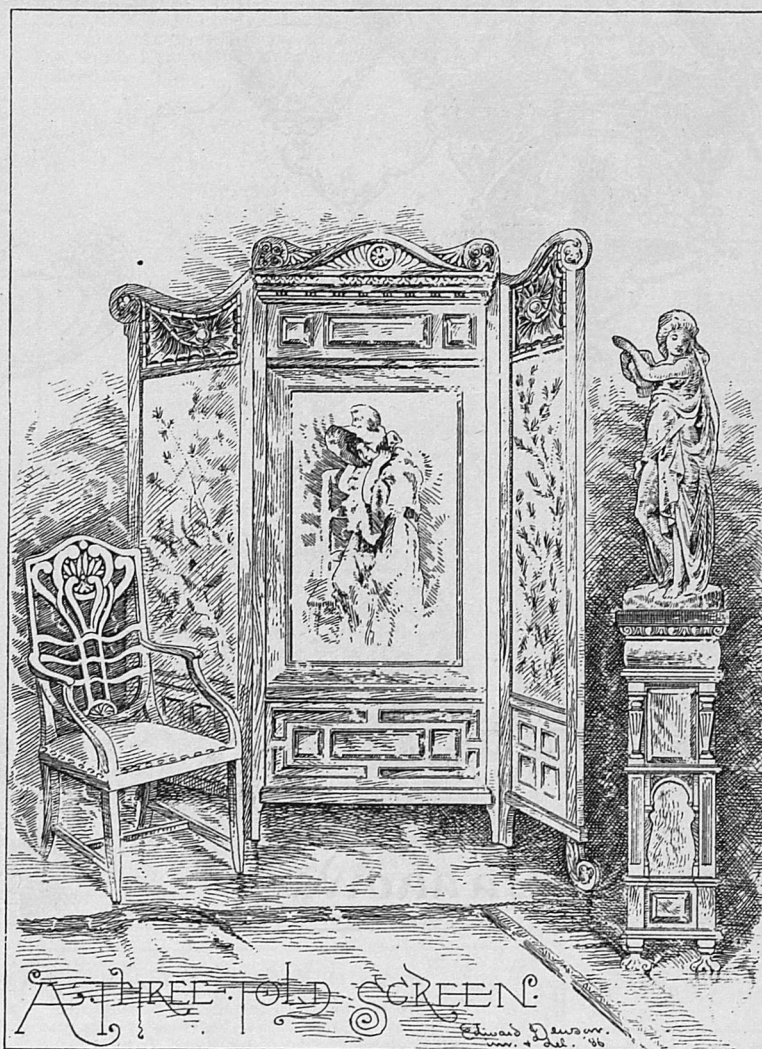
masters, to be sure, are not within the reach of everybody's purse, but in the Louvre at Paris, the National Gallery in London, and in the collections of Germany and Italy, the best masters are to be had for the copying. In decorative art everything is permissible which ensures a splendid design, and with so many young artists and art students anxious to earn a few guineas, there should be nothing to prevent any one possessing a screen of the kind.

In the case, however, of those who can neither rove round galleries in Europe nor send flying orders to young artists across the waters, I have another suggestion to make. Old engravings, medieval prints, the exquisite designs of Albrecht Dürer can be enlarged for the purpose in rich monochrome tones on unvarnished wood, and with the best possible result. Some original designs by Mr. Hubert Herkomer, and which were exhibited in the German Athenæum, London, some few years back, were happy examples of the kind, and could safely be imitated by the ambitious amateur. A careful outline must be obtained when this work is essayed, the monochrome being worked in by preference in water colors (although oil colors may be employed, if preferred). Should a "prentice hand" try this form of decoration, I should advise the panels being left separate, so as to enable them to be placed on an easel while they are being worked, the upright position of a screen being awkward to the novice. Later on, when the artist's work is completed, the cabinet maker can add the beadings, hinges and finishing touches required. The work here suggested is especially adapted to dining-rooms or halls where the wood employed is light, unpolished oak, the rich tones of sepia harmonizing admirably with the unstained wood.

The most pleasing contrasts are indeed attainable by thus using monochrome; over-mantles and over-doors also lending themselves to this mode of decoration when the panels of a screen frighten the beginner by its size. Over-doors particularly can be made to look both quaint and original by a simple device. In an artistic house I saw the other day, one of these pretty contrivances formed of a shelf for pots, with an oblong panel below which was ornamented with a few sprays of dafodils drawn in the simple upright position in which they grow.

As a hint to the amateur decorator I may add that one of these graceful additions to the modern door is very easily effected

whenever the wood-work of a room requires a fresh coat of paint. The over-door, or the skeleton of it can be made by any common carpenter or wood turner, and when once set in its place, painted the color of the door and decorated as it pleases the fancy of the owner. In a Louis XV. room, for instance, an over-door might have a panel or a couple of panels running the length of the top of the door, painted with one of the spirited designs of Watteau or Boucher. A good design is the great essential in decoration, I therefore mention the masters of the last century as being the most appropriate for the purposes of ornamentation, although now and again such modern painters as Charles Chaplin—on whom the mantle of Boucher and Fragonard seems to have fallen—may be safely taken as a guide. I have before me as I write an example of this



most typical of French painters in a little etching which could be reproduced in monochrome on wood as it stands. The subject is slight, merely a bare-footed girl fishing by a stream, while cupids disport themselves at the river's brink. The design is simplicity itself, but it is full of life and charm. Such etchings

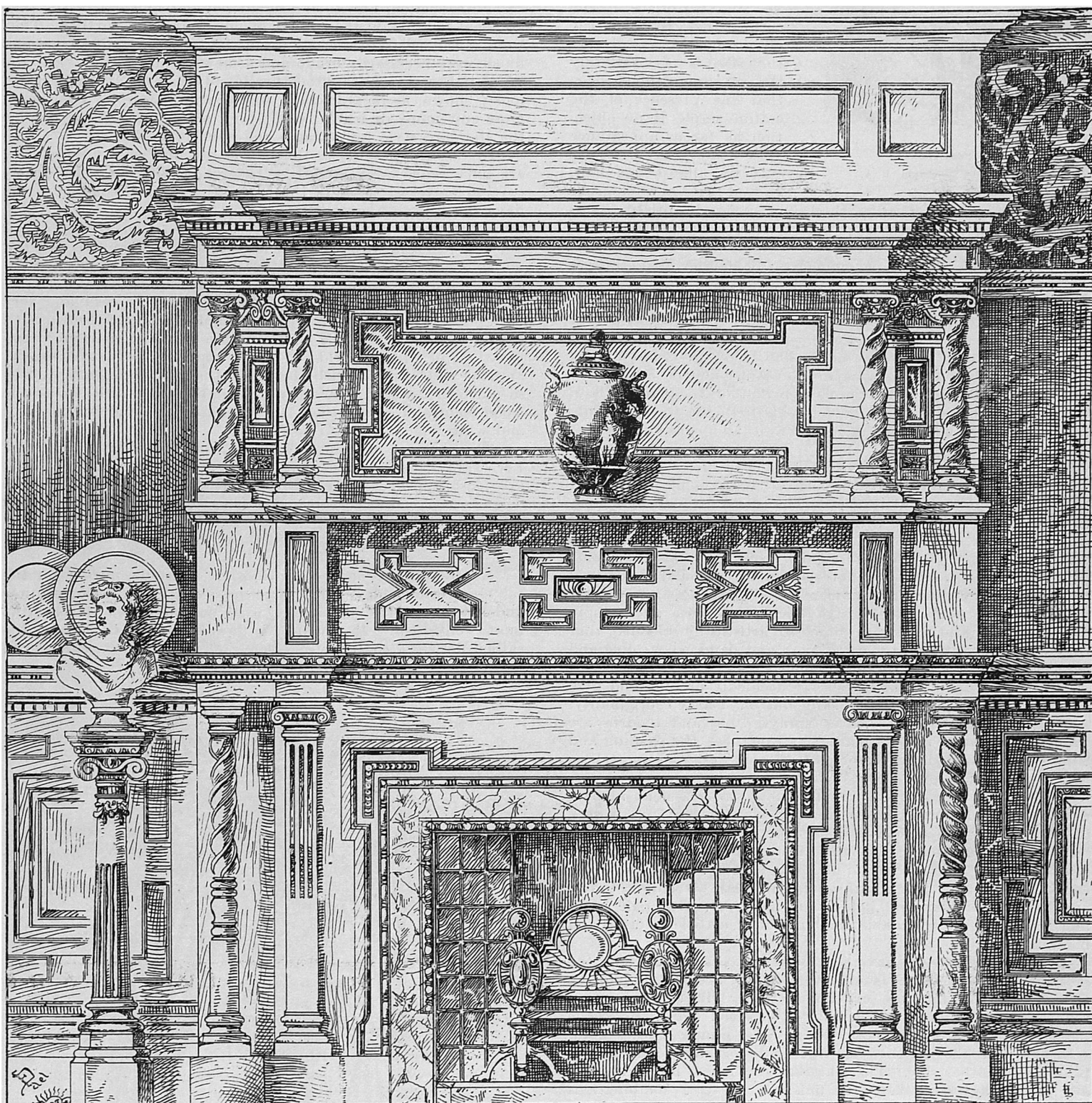
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

(setting aside proofs before letters which are sought after by connoisseurs), can be obtained now for a mere nothing, so that the most beautiful designs are in reality to be had for the asking.

Before concluding I must not forget a promise I made some months ago of describing a chimney-piece after Watteau, which I had only space to mention in a former paper. In this case the design was original, the artist having a peculiar fondness for depicting the small god of love. Cupids toying with roses formed the subject of the mantelpiece, which was built of ebony, a sombre wood requiring the cheery hues employed to give it relief. The chimney-piece itself was one of the new fashioned—or, rather, old fashioned high ones, having panels in the uprights of the mantelpiece as well as in the over-mantel. In these panels the artist, by one of those flukes which are sometimes happier than our toilsome endeavors, had secured the most charming effect at the cost of little trouble. A sketch of cupids had been originally drawn on tracing paper and gummed into one of the

panels to try the effect. The result was so satisfactory that the artist had immediately put in the colors—using by the bye a good deal of medium in order to keep the panel transparent, and subsequently glazing and varnishing the whole. The result is quaint and effective to the last degree. Experts take it for a last century design. Esthetics, to be sure, may call it false art, purists grumble that these panels are not “painted on wood;” but the look of the work has such an old world charm that I give the history of its accidental birth in case those readers who are neither esthetes nor purists may choose to copy this London chimney-piece on the other side of the Atlantic rollers.

New pitchers are nearly straight, the tops being slightly smaller than the bottom, the spout or pouring edge projecting slightly, so that there is no danger of the water trickling down the sides as it is poured.



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